Foreword and overview for The sense of humor : explorations of a personality characteristic / Broschur - Veröffentlicht: 30. Juli 2007

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Foreword and overview
Sense of humor: A new look at an old concept

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Both laypersons and scholars assign the sense of humor a prominent role in our lives. In everyday life individuals use expressions like *having* or *lacking* a *sense of humor* to explain why people behave the way they do. This need to distinguish among facets of humorous and humorless personalities can be deduced from the fact that cultures typically have developed a rich vocabulary of humor-related nouns, verbs, and adjectives allowing for differentiated descriptions. Scholars in different disciplines have postulated links between the phenomena they study (coping with stress, mating success, health, etc.) and a sense of humor; but, for convincing empirical examination of these hypotheses, clearly spelled out concepts and psychometrically sound assessment instruments are needed. The necessity for a personality approach to humor is also evident in research establishing general theories of humor: Individuals behave differently in humor experiments and this can not be ascribed only to failure to keep the conditions equal for everybody.

Humor in personality research

Throughout its history personality research has dealt with humor in a variety of ways. One major goal of personality research, the comprehensive description of the individual, obviously would not be achieved if humor-related personality descriptors are omitted. Not surprisingly, markers of humor were included in the typological, configurational, and dimensional approaches to personality taxonomy, allowing one to locate humor in broader personality concepts. Early characterological observations assigned humor variables to the *sanguine* temperament (Kant 1798); the first large-scale statistical study of temperament related humor to *predominance of primary-function* (Heymans & Wiersma 1908); and early clinical/psychiatric studies assigned it to the *cyclothymic/cycloid* temperament (Kretschmer 1925). Humor was included in factor analytic studies, starting from the first in the personality domain (Webb 1915) to more recent psycholexical studies of personality (e.g., Hofstee & Van Heck 1990). Interestingly, many of these scholars also studied humor outside

of this taxonomy or personality question (Cattell & Tollefson 1966; Eysenck 1942; Heymans 1896; Kant 1790).

A second tradition in personality research refers to the validation of personality constructs in the field of humor. Typically, researchers correlated the trait of interest (e.g., extraversion, locus of control, conservatism, anxiety, dogmatism, etc.) with appreciation of different types of humor (most often the Freudian trilogy of harmless, sexual and aggressive jokes). Since consistent and fairly high relationships between humor and personality were obtained, this approach was expanded using humor tests as a tool for the indirect assessment of personality traits.

Third, personality psychologists worked more specifically on the definition, dimensionality, and measurement of the sense of humor itself. While some scholars, like Allport, gave definitions pointing out the nature of a sense of humor, others, like Cattell and Eysenck, conducted series of factor analyses aimed at deriving taxonomies of humorous material resulting in humor tests measuring the appreciation aspect of sense of humor. While most of these attempts were restricted to *one* domain (e.g., humor appreciation), integrative studies examined the number and nature of dimensions of the sense of humor by factor analyzing humor tests measuring *different* aspects of sense of humor. In a pioneering study, Eysenck (1952) started with five definitions of the sense of humor and assessed six markers of humor among other tests of personality and intelligence in a sample of 76 females: A *Limerick Ranking test*, in which participants ranked twelve limericks in order of funniness (the score was the amount of agreement with the average ranking of the whole group); a *Limerick Liking test*, in which the participants indicated how many of the limericks they considered funny; two tests of *humor creation*, where participants had to write captions for cartoons, or find an amusing ending for social situations (judges scored the creative efforts); a *peer-rating of sense of humor*; and a *self-rating of sense of humor*.

While the self- and peer-ratings of sense of humor and one of the humor creativity tests loaded on the same factor, the other markers were distributed over two further factors which were primarily marked by intelligence and neuroticism, clearly suggesting that measures of sense of humor are not unidimensional. Eysenck commented on the results as follows:

> Clearly the results cannot be regarded as in any sense final; different sets of tests, different populations, different culture patterns might easily produce results differing widely from those reported. Nevertheless, it is only through comparisons of different experiments, carried out in different conditions, that we can learn about the influence of those aspects of the experimental situation over which we have no control. At the very least, this research would seem to have confirmed the suspicion expressed by many writers that the concept of 'sense of

> humour' is not a unitary one, but that we are dealing rather with a multitude of independent aspects which must be quantified and studied separately. This research marks the beginning of a taxonomic study of the position of these various aspects within the total personality space (Eysenck 1952: 275).

While personality research on humor never really ceased, in the last decade there has been a renaissance of the concept of sense of humor in basic and applied humor research (see Ruch 1996). However, while the first wave in this resurgence of interest predominantly led to a large number of new instruments and their enthusiastic application to a variety of exciting new research questions, only now are we addressing the more fundamental issues that must be resolved when studying any genuine personality concept. This current reorientation somewhat involves exempting the concept from its historical fetters. For example, from fields like philosophy, literature, and phenomenology, that historically dealt with the sense of humor and shaped its meaning, we have inherited non-behavioral definitions of this elusive concept; as such, a comprehensive description of everyday humorous conduct remained the task for current research (Craik et al. 1996). Another historical restriction to overcome is that of disciplinary boundaries. Given the nature of the phenomena covered, humor has been studied from many perspectives; for example, laughter as an innate pre-lingual vocal signal was of interest to the natural sciences, while humor as an attitude towards the world was of interest to philosophers. The canon of research questions posed is increasing in diversity, as exemplified by the structure of the current book, and begins to overlap with that typical of general research in personality. While the current spirit of rediscovering the study of a central facet of human personality generally involves a critical appraisal of the present state of the art and an orientation towards the future, looking backward to the origins of the term and the concept is vital; since understanding the historical development helps determine future directions. This book, therefore opens with an extensive historical review of approaches to the sense of humor; and the etymology of the expression will be examined next.

"What is humor" and "What is a 'sense of humor'?"

These two questions were frequently posed as section headings in earlier writings and must be dealt with here as well, even though I consider them somewhat misleading questions implying answers containing absolute truth. Therefore, rather than answering, I prefer to reformulate them into two more awkward but more focused questions: "How have we used humor so far", and "How do we want to understand humor as a scientific concept". (In principle, the same questions need to be posed for the "sense of humor", as it builds upon the meaning of humor.)

The multiple usage of "humor". The meaning of humor is best illuminated by fixing its position in the complex net of terms used in the whole field. At present several formal and informal nomenclatures coexist and, unlike in other disciplines, no committee has decided on some common, binding usage of terminology in humor research. One historical nomenclature stems from the field of aesthetics (as studied by philosophers and psychologists) where *the comic* — defined as the faculty able to make one laugh or to amuse — is distinguished from other aesthetic qualities, such as beauty, harmony, or the tragic. Humor is simply *one* element of the comic — as are wit, fun, nonsense, sarcasm, ridicule, satire, or irony — and basically denotes a smiling attitude toward life and its imperfections: an understanding of the incongruities of existence. Humor in this narrow sense was seen to be based on a sympathetic heart, not on a superior spirit (like wit), moral sense or even haughtiness/maliciousness (like mock/ridicule), or vitality/high spirits (like fun). In this terminological system it is not possible to refer to a joke as an example of "aggressive humor" since, humor *by definition* is benevolent and jokes typically not considered vehicles for humor. Furthermore, in this system, "sense of humor" has a narrower meaning and does not incorporate what would be understood by a "sense of fun", "sense of wit", or "sense of mockery" etc. For example, Sir Harold Nicolson (1886–1968) wrote:

> "...the sense of humour, as distinct from the sense of the comic, is affected, not by a sudden manifestation of the incongruous, but by a gradual realisation of the incongruous. This is a significant difference. It suggests that the sense of humour, unlike the appreciation of wit, does not require the stimulus of condensation and surprise. It suggests also that the sense of humour entails processes which are slower than those of the physical or immediate reaction; that it is an attitude of mind rather than an activity of mind; that it is a contemplative subconscious habit rather than an intuitive flash; ..." (Nicolson 1946: 14).

The other major terminological system, largely endorsed by current Anglo-American research (and in everyday language) uses humor as the umbrella-term for *all* phenomena of this field. Thus, humor replaced *the comic* and was treated as a neutral term; i.e., not restricted to positive meanings. In this context, humor can be "aggressive" and jokes may be considered as humor and form a very frequent subject and domain of study. Since differentiation among phenomena is still required, the proposed label often contain the key term supplemented by a qualifier. For example, *humor creation* and *aggressive/disparagement humor* displaced *wit* and *mock/ridicule*, respectively, and perhaps *coping humor* is part of what was once understood by *humor* alone. However, current terminology can be considered in a state of flux: new concepts and terms are constantly added while older terms are still in use; thus,

different terms for the same phenomena coexist (as do scientific and quotidian terms). In this system, it would only be consistent to use "sense of humor" as an umbrella-term for the totality of habitual individual differences; nevertheless, while we sometimes refer to a "hostile," "unhealthy," or "destructive" sense of humor, generally the term "sense of humor" has not lost its positive connotations (as evinced by sense of humor scales' typical avoidance of items referring to the ability to put others down in a funny way).

Other taxonomies have been proposed with no superordinate term. Freud, for example, distinguished among jokes, humor, and comic, without hierarchical differences. This suggests that there is no natural need for a superordinate term, unless one needs a heading of some sort, much as one would use "emotion" or "intelligence" as an encyclopedia entry.

"Humor" then means something different depending on the framework and unawareness of these coexisting and differing terminologies leads to confusion in both theory and empirical findings. For example, Freud's theory of humor is not a theory of "humor" in today's sense; using jokes or cartoons to test Freud's hypotheses relating to humor is therefore problematic. Likewise, if a former theory of laughter (established before the term "humor" even entered the field of the *riducula*) is now, in retrospect, declared a theory of humor, and tested experimentally utilizing jokes, it's unclear whether a negative outcome invalidates the theory itself or simply means that the realm in which the experiment was conducted was not representative of the original boundaries of the theory. These old theories do not refer, after all, to the vicarious experience of canned jokes, but highlight, rather, the triumph or "sudden glory" *in situ*.

Etymology of "humor." According to Schmidt-Hidding (1963) terms from the semantic field of the ludicrous entered the English language in five stages (with *laughter*, *laugh* being among the earliest and *nonsense* coming late in the last century), each stage molded by the spirit of the epoch. To some extent, the terms still reflect that spirit. This is also true for the key term "humor," for which humanism was a critical issue. As Schmidt-Hidding (1963) meticulously pointed out, for several languages (German, English, and Spanish), there were many transitions in the meaning of the term *humor*, and, like *wit* (which had previously meant reason, mind, accumulated knowledge), the term did not enter the field of the comic before the late 16th century. Earlier, *humor* (better: *umor*) meant liquid or fluid in Latin. Then, in medical language, *humores* was a term denoting body fluids primarily, blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. It entered as *humour* into Middle English via French (responsible for the *ou*), still primarily a technical term, associated with the humor theory of temperament and humoral-pathology. Physiological theory at that time assumed that the mixture (*L. temperare* = to combine or blend in

proper proportion) of the four humors in the make-up of a person was expressed in physical appearance, physiognomy, and proneness to disease. Optimally, the *humours* are balanced, but a predominance of blood, phlegm, yellow bile, or black bile yields, respectively, the sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic temperament.

As medical science progressed, humoral pathology was abandoned which should also have been a natural time for the word *humour* to disappear, as it lost its original significance as a causal construct explaining personal characteristics and so far was mainly used by the educated. But meanwhile, a variety of characterological observations had been added (Stelmack & Stalikas 1991) and the temperament theory — and the term humour — survived as an anthropological theory (e.g., Kant 1798). One of the supplements to the theory was that a predominance of humors or body fluids was responsible for labile behavior or mood in general (1561 OED [Oxford English Dictionary]); so humour referred to a more or less predominant mood quality either positive (good humour) or negative (bad humour). Good humoured and bad humoured eventually became dispositions and by the turn of the 16th century the dictionary definition of *good humour* was 'the condition of being in a cheerful and amiable mood; also, the disposition or habit of amiable cheerfulness.' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, in 1616), clearly anticipating what we today would call an affect-based state-trait approach to humor.

In the 1680's throughout Europe the meaning of *humour* was expanded to include behavior deviating from social norms, or abnormality in general, and thus provided the basis for the term's entrance into the field of the comic. A *humour* meant an odd, uncommon, and eccentric character whose peculiarities emerged from an imbalance of body fluids and who was subsequently laughed at (e.g., in Ben Johnson's "Everyman out of his humour"). Later, this involuntary funny, odd and quaint object of laughter became known as the *humourist*, and the *man of humour* (Corbin Morris, 1710–1779) took pleasure in exposing and imitating the peculiarities of the humourist. Humor and wit became seen as talents relating to the ability to make others laugh. (Note that the *talent of humor* still is not the *sense of humor* as it came to be understood later, as it may poke fun at the weaknesses of concrete persons and not portray human weaknesses in general in a benevolent way.)

The next significant shift was humanism, inasmuch as *humour* acquired its positive, versus formerly neutral, meaning (the frequent association of "good" and "humour" eventually made the neutral term humour into a positively loaded term). By the end of the 17th century, people had become weary of "put-down" witticisms. People should not be laughed at because of peculiarities of temperament, it was argued, since they were not responsible for them. Rather one should smile kindly at an imperfect world and human nature. Moralists tried to distinguish between "true" and "false" wit, as they did between "good" and "bad" humor. A term became neces-

sary for the *humanitarian*, *tolerant*, and *benevolent* forms of laughter, and that term was found in *good humour*, later *humour* alone (Schmidt-Hidding 1963). During this epoch there was also a gradual shift in humor *dispositions* from sheer *ability* (a talent of ridicule, wit, or humor) to make others laugh to a *virtue* of sense of humor. While one should not poke fun at those who are simply different, it was permissible to laugh at the pompous, the unreal, the faked, the conceited, etc. Of course, even a serious person can hold attitudes and views, etc. which are ridiculous and one means of verifying their reasonableness is to expose oneself to a "test of ridicule" (as suggested by Shaftesbury, 1671–1713). *Good humour* denoted the sovereign attitude of exposing oneself to the criticism and mockery of others. Schmidt-Hidding notes this may have been the origin of the notion of the "sense of humor" although this expression was not yet in use. Later, other elements were added, for example, a report about a meeting of soldier invalids of war in Bath mentioned that they were able to laugh at their misfortunes thanks to their wisdom and life experience. Elsewhere, a letter states somebody has no idea of humor; he does not like laughter at his own expense (see Schmidt-Hidding 1963, for more examples).

At the beginning of the 19th century the conceptual distinction between wit and humour was completed. *Humour* received a philosophical twist; e.g., Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1843) stated that humor arises "whenever the finite is contemplated in reference to the infinite" (quoted from Schmidt-Hidding 1963: 141). According to Schmidt-Hidding in the 19th century *humour* became a specific English cardinal virtue, joining others such as *common sense*, *tolerance*, *compromise*. In the second half of the 19th century the sense of humor was part of the English life style and a person lacking it was not considered complete. The political predominance of the British Empire spread the concept, and humor as a model life style extended beyond its boundaries. For Schmidt-Hidding, who endorsed the terminology in aesthetics as the only scientifically fruitful one, this was the end-point of the development of the term; later writers only elaborated the concept but did not essentially change its meaning. (Note that, for example, Freud's specialized use of "humor" as distinct from wit/jokes and comic is derived from this philosophical tradition. While he added a genuine psychological perspective to it, the specific use of the term can not be attributed to him since it is rooted in the culture of the time.)

Some characteristics of this narrow meaning of humour, and how humour differs from other comic phenomena, are nicely summarized by Nicolson (1956: 18):

> "... the essential difference between humour and wit is that, whereas wit is always intentional, humour is always unintentional. Wit possesses an object; it is critical, aggressive and often cruel; it depends for its success upon condensation, revelation, suddenness and surprise, and it necessitates a quick and deliberate motion of the mind; it is not a private indulgence but invariably needs an

> audience, it is thus a social phenomenon. Humour on the other hand has no object; it does not seek to wound others, it seeks only to protect the self; it is not a sword but a shield. So far from entailing an expenditure of intellectual or psychic effort, it seeks to economise that effort; it does not depend upon suddenness or surprise, but is contemplative, conciliatory, ruminating; and it is largely a private indulgence and does not require an audience for its enjoyment."

Nicolson also sums up irony or satire: "Humour ... observes human frailty indulgently and without bothering to correct it; irony and satire have a nobler and more didactic purpose. Whereas irony, being critical and pessimistic, demonstrates the difference between the real and the ideal, humour, being uncritical and optimistic either ignores the difference, or pretends that it is not, after all, so very important." (Nicolson 1956: 19).

One is tempted to search for a further step in the development of the term to account for our current understanding which is so different from this specialized, exclusively positive connotation, but this is not necessary. First, the narrower meaning of humor is preserved in some countries and in some academic disciplines. Second, even in England, the more neutral, broader, meaning of humor was still valid during the apex of the term's humanistic connotations and the distinctions made by writers and philosophers did not enter common language. Third, the term humor and this particular understanding of it were not adopted by all cultures (for example, "humor" got less attention in French). Finally, I could not find any explicit discussion of when and why this specialized terminology was abandoned and why it would be better to endorse our current understanding of the term.

Whether or not this shift of "humor" to an exclusively positive term was a historical episode we have now overcome will depend on future terminology. It is different with "sense of humor", though. Though this expression builds on the meaning of "humor", it seems that the humanistic influence has faded out less for *sense of humor* than for *humor*. The historically acquired connotations still have a lasting effect on current thinking in many ways, as (a) they appeal to humanistic psychologists, like Maslow or Rogers, who helped maintain this conceptualization into the present, (b) we perceive sense of humor as high in social desirability, (c) we hesitate to study sense of humor in the context of any negative attribute, and (d) our trait concepts are blind for the negative sides of humor.

However, this historical development also extended the scope of what we study today beyond the more natural *creation* and *appreciation* of the ridiculous to a third domain. Both appreciation and creation of humor deal with something intrinsically funny or pleasant. Even though the attempt to be funny may fail on the part of the producer, and a receiver might not find all humorous messages funny, some even annoying, the common denominator is still that the nature of the message created/

appreciated ideally is amusing. Thus, a personality approach describes how people differ in the way they perceive, interpret and enjoy humor stimuli or involuntarily funny objects and messages and in their ability or style of inventing, communicating, or channeling humorous messages. This third domain of study of humor, however, relates to the inherently unpleasant; it accommodates the observation that despite the presence of adversity typically conducive to negative emotions, processes might mitigate or alleviate negativity, perhaps even shift the outcome to the positive. The personality approach to this understanding of the sense of humor then considers that there are individual differences in the resources that enable the individual to deal with adversity in such a way.

From past to present and future

In today's academic writings we consider the expression "sense of humor" in several ways: (a) as a quotidian term, or folk concept; in research assessed by a Likert scale (anchored only by the expression and a quantifier, leaving it entirely to respondents what they want to understand by it); (b) in statements (of typically one sentence length) defining its nature; (c) as a concept developed by theorists, typically involving only the philanthropic facets and rarely supplemented by a rich behavioral description, or a theory of the concept's structure and dynamics, (d) as a label of assessment tools; i.e., as what a sense of humor instrument measures. These different usages rarely overlap. Assessment tools typically are not based on *a priori* theory of the concept, and the folk concept does not match how theorists have thought of it.

The trait labels. How shall we use the term in the future? As a folk concept best avoided in research? As a lay personality concept of interest to those who study personal constructs? In its restricted historical meaning, i.e., as outlined by some theorists but not yet measured? Alternatively, we might decide that for research purposes we want to use it (e) as an umbrella term for *all* habitual individual differences in humor; i.e., including negative forms of humor, since the term now tends to exclude less benevolent forms of the comic like sarcasm, mock, ridicule, satire, irony. But this is only possible if we define its meaning anew and construct a trait descriptive of individual differences in all forms of humor behavior, not only the philanthropic ones. Before we do so we need to ask ourselves: With its history, is it still possible to use "sense of humor" as a descriptive technical term, communicating its yet-to-be established meaning without transporting unwanted connotations? We need to be aware that we would be making a shift from a value-laden prescriptive to a neutral descriptive expression. While the historical view into the sense of humor revealed that the current high social desirability of the sense of humor is tau-

tological (i.e., the outcome of a process of arbitrarily restricting the term's use to benevolent occasions of laughter), we might still hesitate to formulate hypotheses stating that, for example, individuals high in (a component of) sense of humor are prone to deceit, sexual harassment, or cruelty. Also, as pointed out recently (Ruch 1996a), since interindividual differences in humor behavior and experience are multidimensional, the components will carry the theoretical burden, while "sense of humor" will merely serve as a category label, or collective noun, for the entirety of these dimensions, and by itself have no predictive or explanatory power.

Of course we could do without the expression sense of humor altogether. Scholars use alternative terms when they refer to habitual individual differences in humor behavior and experience, such as *styles of humor*, *humor use*, *humorous temperament*, or simply *humor*. And other terms, like wit, have already been used as research terms. Nevertheless, I opted to keep the expression "sense of humor" in the title of this book. Pragmatically: this was the expression used in most of the chapters. Sense of humor is also the most commonly used expression in everyday life; it clearly connotes individual differences where "humor" alone may not since it is also a mood term ("being in good or bad humor") or may refer to the stimulus itself ("cartoon humor", etc.). Furthermore, agreement on the matter seemed unlikely before the publication of this volume; this discussion only began recently. While the proposed usage of the expression in the present book might mean a breach with history, I needed an all-encompassing term, dealing with *all* facets of the ridiculous. Tradition and preserving the narrow meaning sense of humor had acquired would necessitate terms for the other dimensions representing habitual individual differences in humor, and, most important, a new category label encompassing all these traits. Sense of comic currently seemed to be out of the question. Future developments will show what expression will turn out to be best-suited to study. Perhaps sense of humor and humor will share the fate of *the comic*: When it came to mean everything it lost its meaning and fell into disuse.

The concepts. Irrespective of the terminological decisions, the concepts' substance need work. As outlined above, the question as to what sense of humor "really" means does not lead anywhere, as the acquired meaning was not the outcome of the wish for precision of language but loaded by world views and values. Moralists fought against the destructive potential of laughter, humanists restricted the meaning of humor to its benevolent side, philosophers recognized humor as a philosophical attitude towards life. Now it is up to researchers to disentangle *description* and *evaluation*, to broaden the scope to include all phenomena irrespective of whether we consider them good or bad, and to find a rationale for comprehensive lists of descriptors. In my search of the historical literature I found definitions which elevated sense of humor to such idealized spheres that the authors were no longer able to

provide examples for its illustration. In contemporary questionnaires we find items that are mere re-formulations of theories. Both examples may count as indicators that we have been lacking systematic behavioral descriptions of the phenomena of the field — an omission we have partly overcome during the last years for some domains such as humor appreciation or everyday humorous conduct. But natural language may help in defining the dimensions. As Goldberg (1982: 204) says: "Those individual differences that are the most significant in the daily transactions of persons with each other will eventually become encoded into their language. The more important such a difference is, the more people will notice it and wish to talk of it. With the result that eventually they will invent a word for it."

As for the future, I refer readers to the suggestions made in the chapters, notably the ones by Craik and Ware, Martin, and Raskin, indicating that this resurgence of interest in a personality view of humor involves a reorientation. I would add that further progress might be achieved by making systematic use of advances made in other fields. For example, Freud (1928) discussed how humor is a remedy against displeasurable feelings such as embarrassment or pain. Some people might use humor in face of anger and others in empathy; but what are the number and nature of negative states in which humor can help as a coping device? A comprehensive definition and assessment of humor as a coping skill should cover the study of all negative states that can interact with humor, and the existing taxonomies of negative emotional states should be helpful in answering this question and in eliminating the *etc.'s* we have been accepting readily for too long.

The chapters

The book is divided into six parts: (1) an introductory section which reviews the history of thought and major theoretical issues; (2) a section in which major new models of different aspects of the sense of humor are advanced and research on current approaches is presented; (3) a section on group and national differences; (4) a section on developmental changes and short-term intraindividual variation; (5) a section on the various causes of inter- and intra-individual differences; and, finally, (6) an appendix with the existing assessment tools and variables.

In this book we have attempted to address new questions, such as the influence of hereditary and environmental factors in the genesis of humor use and whether components of sense of humor can be changed by a systematic training program. The extremes on the dimensions of humor are also covered, be they in terms of clinical-diagnostic categories or professional humorists. Also, the question of whether there are current activated and not only habitual dispositions for humor behavior is newly

posed. While some chapters represent areas of research with a long tradition and high intensity of research, others are the first studies of their kind.

What is missing? We have not tried to revive the historical conceptualizations of the sense of humor, make them measurable, and study the associated hypotheses. There is little, if any, elaboration on the negative facets of humor; i.e., skills and personality style involved in ridicule, mockery, etc., and while various chapters cover wit, or humor creation, it's clear that we need more research on that topic as well as on fun/farce (completing Schmidt-Hidding's key "comic" words: humor, wit, mock/ridicule, fun). There is no compilation yet of the current lexical corpus of humor-related terms for the English language. While we did start such a project for German terms, it might be premature to report about it, as only the study of nouns is completed. The compilation of the terms, at best in different languages, and their systematic classification and evaluation would be a worthwhile endeavor, and the study of their interrelation might help to arrive at the dimensions involved in everyday language. Finally, the measurement of the sense of humor is only indirectly dealt with as individual chapters mention and apply measurement tools in empirical studies. In the appendix a brief nonevaluative review of historic and current instruments is provided along with a list of variables measured.

While this book is a document on the state of the art in defining humor at a trait level, it also only marks the start of a long journey. Further inquiry is needed to fill in the blanks which we have uncovered here; yet the chapters demonstrate that research on sense of humor is coming of age and moving slowly towards mainstream personality research.